DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 670 EC 160 830

AUTHOR Dudley-Marling, Curtis; Rosenberg, Richard
TITLE Parent Involvement in the Multidisciplinary-Team Process.
PUB DATE [79]
NOTE 12p.; Print is light and broken.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; Teamwork

ABSTRACT

The paper presents a rationale for involving parents of handicapped children in the multidisciplinary team process and offers suggestions to facilitate the involvement. Parental rights guaranteed by P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, are summarized. Advantages of parent involvement include increased understanding of their child's disability, improved prospects for implementing the team's recommendations, and enhanced parent-professional relationships. Among facilitative strategies considered are specific preparation to help parents participate effectively in the team process, designation of a specific parent role in the team functioning, and appointment of a parent advocate with responsibilities for overseeing parent participation. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED235670

Parent Involvement in the Multidisciplinary-Team Process

by

Acknowledgements: Curtis Dudley-Marling and Richard Rosenberg are doctoral students in the Department of Studies in Behavioral Disabilities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The ordering of authors was arbitrary; both authors contributed equally to this publication.

EC 160830

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Curtis Dudley-Marling
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Abstract

Given the impetus of state and federal mandates, school personnel are recognizing the value of parent participation in the educational process. However, the authors believe that school districts have not taken full advantage of parental resources. The quality of programs for exceptional children can be improved if the role of parents is expanded to include involvement in multidisciplinary team (M-team) process. The advantages of school districts expanding the role of parents is considered. Finally, the authors suggest several strategies to facilitate parent participation in the M-team process.

Parent Involvement in the Multidisciplinary-Team Process

INTRODUCTION

Educators are beginning to realize that the quality of educational programming for exceptional children can be enhanced by effective parental involvement in the educational process. Traditionally, parents - natural, foster, group home, or legal guardians - have been the forgotten person(s) in the development and implementation of educational programs. In most cases, the school is responsible for children from 8:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M., the parents responsible for their children for the rest of the day. The two environments often have extremely different expectations, rules, and philosophies. Whether due to bureaucratic expediency, professional arrogance, benign neglect, or parental reluctance, only in rare instances have the school and parents truly cooperated in educational programming and planning.

In complying with federal mandates, many school districts are beginning to recognize the value of parental input into educational planning and programming for exceptional children. However, in the authors' experience, few school districts have developed effective strategies or facilitative mechanisms for maximizing the quality of parental participation.

The authors believe that, for the most part, parents are caring, energetic, people who have a genuine concern for their child and are anxious to do as much as possible to help their child achieve their potential. The purpose of this paper is to provide a rationale for involving parents in the M-team process, and to suggest strategies that will facilitate parental participation.

THE LAW AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR PARENTS

Barbara Scheiber states in an article in Closer Look that: "The recognition of the role, and the rights, of parents of handicapped children is one of the most significant changes in public policy brought about by The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142). There is no longer any legitimate debate about whether parents participate in planning and monitoring their child's educational program. Every step along the way -- from the time a child's special need is first suspected -- a parent's right to take action is now protected by law." (Scheiber, 1977)

The concept of due process is at the center of protecting the student's rights to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. The right to due process provided by the fourteenth amendment, is a constitutional right guaranteeing that every person will be treated equally under law. Due process is a safeguard for all parties involved, i.e., the student, the parents, the school, and other public agencies.

Some important safeguards that insure parents due process procedures are:

> Parents must be notified whenever the school: 1) plans to conduct a special evaluation of a child; 2) wants to change a child's educational placement; or 3) refuses to conduct an evaluation or make a change in placement.
>
> Parents must give their consent before the school conducts the evaluation.
>
> Parents have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation of their child.
>
> Parents must be informed by the school of their right to examine school records that relate to their child's identification, evaluation, and educational placement.

> **Parents must receive a full explanation from the school of all the procedural safeguards provided by the law.**
>
> **Parents have the right to participate in the meetings when the child's educational program is designed.**
>
> **Parents have the right to an impartial hearing if they disagree with the decision of the school. The schools also have the right to request a hearing.**
>
> **Parents and the schools have certain rights in the hearing procedure.**
>
> (Pasanella, 1979)

PL 94-142 is intended to "assume that the rights of handicapped children and their parents or guardians are protected" sec. 601(c). In addition to due process rights, other rights of handicapped children include: the right to appropriate evaluation, the right to an appropriate individual educational program and the right to an appropriate educational placement.

Parents have the right and responsibility to be actively involved in their child's educational programming. PL 94-142 has forced change in the quantity and quality of parental involvement in that school personnel must document and participate in systematically planning for parental involvement. (Buscaglia, 1979)

ADVANTAGES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Yoshida and Gottlieb (1977) noted that the role of parents in the M-team process can extend from being observers to being actively involved in the decision-making process. In a subsequent article, Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, and Maxwell (1978) surveyed a large number of professionals who regularly participated in multidisciplinary or planning team processes. The majority of respondents indicated that parental involvement in the planning process should be limited to presenting and gathering information

relevant to the case. Most professionals would probably endorse this view. It is the authors' position that parents, children, and professionals will all benefit from the active participation of parents in the M-team process. Some of the advantages of this participation are:

1. Parents are generally the most knowledgeable resource concerning their child. There can be little argument that, without extensive input from the parents, M-team decisions are more likely to be based on incomplete, and possibly inaccurate information. Parent participation will allow access to more complete and accurate knowledge of the child's abilities and needs.

2. Participating in the conference may increase parent's awareness of their child's disability. Since a discussion of specific disabilities is often necessary in order to make placement decisions, parents may learn more about their child's disability if they participate in the M-team process.

3. Parent participation will improve the prospect of implementation of team recommendations. As an ego-involved participant in the planning process, parents will be more likely to assume a full share of the responsibility for implementing team recommendations.

4. Parent participation will enhance the probability that team recommendations will fulfill the needs of individual parents and children. Parents of handicapped children are a heterogeneous group with individual needs and values. It is far more likely that planning team recommendations will account for these needs and values if parents actively participate in the planning process. Too often recommendations are offered which may be best for most parents and children, but are not compatible with the needs and

values of an individual family. This can be avoided if parents help shape the overall plan to deal with their child's disability.

5. Parent participation will enhance parent-professional relationships. Participating as co-equal members of a multidisciplinary team may facilitate increased mutual trust and respect between parents and professionals. Additionally, parents will be more likely to perceive that their concerns are not being ignored and later appeals will be minimized (Yoshida and Gottlieb, 1977).

6. The potential role of parents as co-instructors will be enhanced. When parents function as co-instructors with the educational system, the educational day is extended (Kroth and Scholl, 1978). Parents should be better able to function in this role if they participate in the diagnosis and planning stage, as well as the implementation stage of their child's educational program.

7. Parent participation will facilitate communication. To ensure communication and avoid misunderstandings, professionals (and, to some extent, parents) will be forced to communicate more precisely and accurately. There will need to be a reduction of professional jargon which will benefit professionals as well as parents.

FACILITATIVE STRATEGIES

There are several strategies which can be employed to enhance the prospects of successful parental participation in the multidisciplinary team process.

1. Professionals must be prepared to accept parents as co-equal members of the team. Preparations must include professional staff training,

the principal goal of which will be to modify the attitudes of professionals toward parents so they will be able to recognize the potential benefits of expanded parental participation. To achieve this goal it may be helpful to consult with parent organizations to assist in the planning of staff training. Role playing may be a useful technique to help professional staff gain additional respect for parental input. It has been the authors' experience that where parents have been invited to participate in staff conferences professionals have a tendency to direct all of their reporting to the parents. This tendency can be harmful. Professionals will need to recognize that parents are only two members of the team. Finally, staff training can be utilized to alert staff members of the need to eliminate, or at least minimize, the use of jargon which usually confuses rather than clarifies communication.

2. Parents will require specific preparation in order to participate effectively in the M-team process. Parents should become familiar with the evaluation procedures used to assess their child's abilities prior to M-team meetings. Toward this end parents should be invited to observe the various evaluations of their child. Additionally, the individual evaluators should explain and discuss their evaluation procedures with the parents.

3. Parents could be assigned a specific role in the M-team process. Several authors have recommended that the parents be assigned some data collection responsibilities (McLoughlin, Edge, and Strenecky, 1978; Morrow, 1969). Parents could, for example, record behavior frequencies and/or collect language samples. Reporting their observations would give them a formal role at M-team deliberations.

4. Appoint a parent advocate. The parent advocate's responsibilities might include overseeing the evaluation process to ensure that the parents are participating and are being properly informed. The advocate might also be responsible for assigning data collection responsibilities to the parents and discussing their role in the M-team process with them. During M-team conferences the advocate would ensure that all relevant questions are posed and that the parents receive unbiased information (Rutherford and Edgar, 1979). Finally, the advocate might meet with the parents several days after the final conference to discuss their understandings of team recommendations.

The advocate could be a professional or a nonprofessional; someone within or outside the school system. However, the special education teacher may be particularly well suited to this role. The special education teacher may already be acquainted with the parents and, in advocating, may establish a relationship that may facilitate the development of the IEP as well as the continuing education of the child.

CONCLUSION

The authors believe that the quality of the M-team process will be enhanced if parents participate and if several facilitating strategies are employed. However, parent participation will not always be efficacious. Sometimes it will fail, but the potential for failure should not be used as a pretense for excluding parents. The presence of volatile emotions could also be used to exclude parent participation, but strong emotions can have the positive effect of injecting a degree of humaness into the process. Additionally, professionals will be able to provide immediate

support for parents' emotional needs. Sensitive information cannot be used to exclude parents, since parents have a legal, as well as a moral right to all information concerning their child.

It must be remembered that parent participation in the M-team process, while entailing certain risks, promises far-reaching benefits. To succeed, however, will require considerable thought and planning as well as adequate preparation of parents and professionals for this new interaction. Broadening the role of parents in the diagnostic and planning stages of the educational program will ensure compliance with the law and better enable parents and professionals to form a lasting partnership to meet the needs of exceptional children.

References

Buscaglia, Leo. Human advocacy and PL 94-142: The educator's roles. Thorofare, NJ 08086, 1979.

Kroth, Roger L., and Scholl. Getting schools involved with parents. Reston, VA: Council of Exceptional Children, 1978.

McLoughlin, James A., Edge, Denzil, Strenecky, Bernard. Perspective on parental involvement in the diagnosis and treatment of learning disabled children. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1978, 11, 291-296.

Morrow, A. J. The practical theorist: The life and work of Kurt Lewin. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969.

Pasanella, Anne L. "Due process: Facts you should know." Exceptional Teacher, Anaheim, California, Vol. 1., Number 1, p. 3-4, 1979.

Rutherford, Robert B., and Edgar, Eugene. Teachers and parents: A guide to interaction and cooperation. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1979.

Scheiber, Barbara. You have new rights--use them. Closer Look, National Information Center for the Handicapped, Washington, D.C., Fall, 1977.

Yoshida, Roland K., Fenton, Kathleen S., Kaufman, Martin J., and Maxwell, James P. Parental involvement in the special education pupil planning process: The school's perspective. Exceptional Children, 1978, 44, 531-534.

Yoshida, Roland K., and Gottlieb, Jay. A model of parental participation in the pupil planning process. Mental Retardation, 1977, 15, 17-20.